

Loving God with Heart *and Mind*

There is an aspect of our love of God that is strangely underdeveloped in our ranks. When we think about our love of God we usually envision something on the emotional level. But in the Bible the love of God also encompasses our thinking.

In the New Testament, there is a noteworthy passage, where a lawyer is in conversation with Jesus about issues of eternal consequence: he wants to know what it takes to inherit eternal life. Jesus refers him back to what is written. The lawyer then recalls the Word of God and gives this answer, which Jesus, in turn, approves:

So he answered and said, “‘You shall **love the LORD your God** with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with **all your mind,**’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’ ” (Luke 10:27 NKJV, emphasis supplied)

This is amazing. Scripture says: you shall *love* God not just with your heart, but *with all your mind!* The Greek word *dianoia* that is used here for the English word mind, describes the “activity of thinking”, “comprehending”, “reasoning”, and “reflecting”, in the sense of understanding something. This is how God has created us. Thinking and reflecting is an activity that God has endowed us human beings with and we have the privilege to exercise our thinking abilities to explore things not only in the Bible but in all areas of life and learning.

To love God with all our minds is a way of *virtuous thinking* that is characterized by certain inner attitudes and dispositions toward things like truth, knowledge and understanding. We are dealing here with the question of **how** we pursue what we do when we engage our thinking. Without exercising *virtuous thinking* we cannot truly love God, nor will we give honor to HIM, and neither will it be an honor for us if we are deficient in these aspects.¹ I would like to submit the following four *virtuous thinking traits* as foundational in our pursuit to express our love of God with our heart *and mind*.²

1) Intellectual Carefulness

Any inquiry into knowledge, any serious study and scientific research requires carefulness. **Those who are intellectually careful earnestly want to know the truth and consistently make sure not to rush to any hasty conclusions that are based on rather limited**

¹ The following ideas are taken from a delightful book that has greatly stimulated my own thinking and inspired me to become a more thoughtful person. I am greatly indebted to Philip E. Dow, *Virtuous Minds: Intellectual Character Development* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), and follow several of his ideas closely.

² Actually there are more thinking virtues. Philip Dow lists seven in his book *Virtuous Minds* but within the limits of this article we will focus on just four indispensable thinking traits.

knowledge.³ Instead intellectually careful people are thorough and diligent in their thinking, *cautious* not to overlook important details. We all know stories where hastiness or carelessness in our work, in our studies, in our relationships, in science and also in theology, has let to disastrous results. Sometimes those negative results of hastiness or careless thinking are seen quickly, sometimes it takes a while until they become evident. But the negative effects are inevitable. If we truly believe that we are children of God, then what we do and *how we do what we do*, should reflect the character of HIM to whom our ultimate loyalties belong. As Seventh-day Adventists, we should pursue and cherish an attitude of intellectual carefulness not just because it is academically sound and scientifically mandated, but because it grows out of our respect of God, who is our creator – and redeemer. HIS example and character compels us to think carefully. Faith is not sloppy. Faith knows no haste. And we do not honor God, if we are not meticulous and careful in what we think, say, research, publish and do! Put positively: you love God with all your heart *and mind*, when you are intellectual careful!

2) Intellectual Fair-Mindedness

A second intellectual virtue is fair-mindedness. **Those who are fair-minded are people who earnestly want to know the truth and therefore deliberately are willing to listen in an even-handed way to different opinions.**⁴ And mind you, if there is no truth the virtue of fair-mindedness morphs into meaninglessness and the end of education is not far!⁵ The secret of a fair-minded person is that he/she has chosen to put the truth over any allegiance to their ego or any allegiance to cherished opinions. Therefore, a fair-minded person is consistently willing to listen in an even-handed way to different opinions, even if he/she has already a strong view on the subject. Fair-minded people also try to view the issue from the perspective of those they disagree with, because they believe that they do not always have the most complete or accurate vantage point on a given issue. One could say: an intellectual fair-minded person seeks more to know the truth in a fair-minded manner, rather than striving to be right. Intellectual bias would be the corresponding vice.⁶

Among the many benefits of intellectually fair-minded people one is particularly practical⁷: genuinely fair-minded people tend to make and keep friends more easily than people whose thinking habits are closed-minded or biased. The reason for this phenomenon is simple: it is the inherent link between fair-mindedness and attentive listening. Fair-minded people, because they are committed to discovering truth, listen. They actually really listen! Very few things give people a greater sense of their own value and worth and nothing attracts us to other people more than the belief that we are valued. This value and respect often is expressed through attentive listening. Such fair-minded thinking leads us toward lives of wisdom, richness

³ Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 147.

⁴ Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 148.

⁵ Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 48. For a powerful argument in favor of truth see Princeton professor Harry G. Frankfurt's short book *On Truth* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 2006).

⁶ Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 49 and 149.

⁷ For the following see Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 52-54.

and depth. Put positively: you love God with all your heart *and mind*, if you are intellectually fair-minded.

3) Intellectual Honesty

A third virtue is intellectual honesty. **Those who are intellectually honest want to encourage the spread of truth and therefore they consistently use information in an unbiased way.**⁸ The intellectually honest person is careful not to use information that is taken out of context. He or she will not exaggerate facts, or distort the truth by describing it with loaded language, or otherwise will mislead others by using statistics or any other type of supporting evidence that might have a deceptive effect. And they do not take credit for evidence or ideas that are not their own.⁹ Of all the intellectual virtues, honesty is perhaps the most admired – but unfortunately it is often the least practiced and most tampered with. Honesty often seems the more difficult road to take, but in the end it is always the one characterized by greater freedom.¹⁰ The really dangerous thing about dishonesty is, that in the end you firmly believe your own lie and you are thoroughly deceived. On the other side, honesty inevitably builds trust between people and restores confidence in leadership and in this way is the foundation of all healthy relationships. Put positively: you love God with all your heart *and mind*, when you practice intellectual honesty!

4) Intellectual Humility

Last but not least, there is the virtue of intellectual humility. **Intellectually humble people have come to the amazing realization and humbling insight that in their thinking they are depended upon something or someone outside themselves. They are aware that truth is not of their own making, but is ultimately God breathed. Thus, they have realized that they are not the measure of everything**¹¹ and therefore they gladly bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ and His word (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5).

A humble inquiry is the foundation of all growth in knowledge for it generates a freedom that naturally produces a teachable spirit. This makes humble people very pleasant people to work with. This does not mean that humble people don't have firm convictions. It only means that they are submissive to God's truth and at the same time are aware of the limitations of their knowledge and *therefore* are capable of expanding their knowledge and understanding of the world in a way that arrogant and proud people are utterly incapable of doing.¹² Put positively: you love God with all your heart *and mind*, if you are intellectually humble.

⁸ Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 151.

⁹ And here I again freely admit my strong dependence on the magnificent thoughts found in Dow, esp. 61-69, 151.

¹⁰ Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 66.

¹¹ Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 72, 152-153.

¹² Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 72.

As Seventh-day Adventists we should love God with all our hearts *and minds* by being intellectually careful, fair-minded, honest and humble. These intellectual virtues are significant in yet another important area: our ability to worship God. Entering into meaningful **worship** with God, is closely tied to the character of our minds. To the extent, that we apply our minds to understanding God in his Written Word of Holy Scripture and to the exploration of Nature that was created by HIM, our ability to worship Him increases. Of course, worship is far more than just knowing a lot of information about God. But our worship and our relationship with God demand that our minds be fully engaged. You cannot truly worship God without thinking. And when we take on those traits of *virtues thinking* our actions will reflect God's goodness and display a teachable spirit that is fairminded and honest.

How we think influences how we behave. If you are careful in what you say about me, if you begin to treat my opinions in a fair-minded way. If you are honest in your dealings with me and if your demeanor reflects humbleness it is only natural that your actual behavior toward me will also grow increasingly gracious!¹³

Imagine if the theological and scientific community we are engaged in and if the church we love and belong to were filled with people of such character and attitude. What a fellowship that would be! Imagine how the relationship and the atmosphere within the church would change for the better if *we all* would practice this. I think God would be delighted. And others would be attracted and we would be greatly blessed! May we be people with such intellectual virtues who *love God* with all our heart *and mind* and give glory to our creator in the *way we think*.

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¹³ Cf. Dow, *Virtuous Minds*, 97-98.